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[Tower Owners: Are You Missing Opportunities?](#)



Andrew Seybold

Towers are all over these days and according to the FCC there will be ten times more towers and sites built out to support the coming wave of 5G wireless technologies.

However, these new towers need to be low level in order to

provide small cell and small area coverage. That means there will be less demand for mountaintop towers and towers on tall buildings from the commercial wireless industry in the coming years.

Many tower owners and those who lease space on towers probably don't remember when towers were built on tops of mountains and why. They were built for the Land Mobile Radio (LMR) community including public safety, business and industrial users, utility companies, and paging operators long before cellular was even a glimmer in a wireless engineer's eye. Many of these towers provided a nice income for their owners in those days.

But then cellular came along in the early 1970s. At first, cellular systems were located on these same towers and owners found they could charge a lot more money for multiple flat-panel antennas built all the way around a typical tower. As cellular, now commercial broadband systems, caught on, paging companies went away and the growth of land mobile radio systems slowed. Nextel came along and bought many of the LMR systems in 800-MHz and converted them to cellular, and soon most of these towers were sporting mostly commercial wireless antennas and the number of white fiberglass antennas dwindled.

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Today, there is still a demand from the land mobile radio industry, and there will be new demand now that the Internet of Things (IoT) has found that narrowband systems will work for them, too. But those who own and lease the space on the towers have been spoiled by the big bucks being paid out by the commercial wireless industry. Let's face it, when a network has sixty or more million users who demand service, the company will pay almost whatever it has to when it needs to add coverage or capacity. Now commercial networks are no longer interested in mountaintops and roofs of tall buildings, they are interested in utility rights-of-ways along streets.

So commercial demand for high towers will dwindle, but land mobile radio operators will always need this tower space. These LMR operators and owners have watched over the years as two things have happened:

- 1) Towers are making a lot of money from commercial wireless,
- 2) Those who lease space today don't understand the LMR industry or its need for a single fiberglass antenna and half a rack of space in the shelter.

It seems many of those who sell space on towers are commissioned and think they need to charge the same amount per month for a single antenna as for a full-up cell site. In some cases they won't even talk to LMR operators because it's not worth their time and energy to lease space for a few hundred dollars a month when they can charge a few thousand a month. As the thousands of dollars start to disappear, will these tower owners be left with only the hulk of a tower with no revenue at all?

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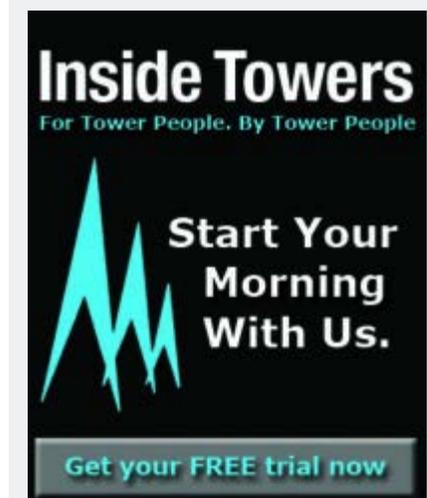
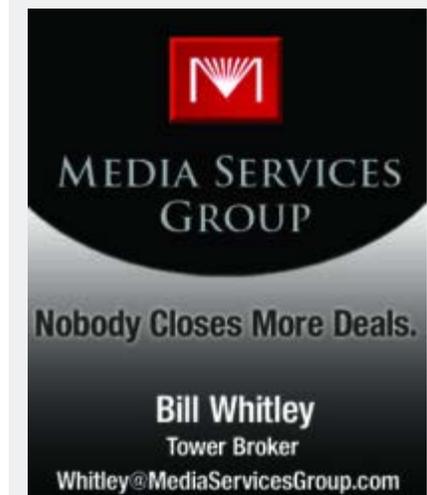
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tenants on them. Yes, it is nice to have commercial wireless customers but there is more money in a tower than commercial systems. LMR systems with a single antenna (single stick) can produce revenue as well, and in most cases LMR monthly rentals will outlast commercial networks' rental periods. It is also a plus to make it easy for one or two local amateur radio systems to use the tower either at a reduced rate or for free. This is because next time the tower owner needs to pull a permit from a city or a county, it can point to the fact that it is providing a public service to the community for emergency communications, which might make the permitting process faster. Further, amateur radio operators are often willing to clean the area of weeds, report any issues with the tower, and basically be a free set of eyes.

What led me to write this article is that for many years I have belonged to and contributed to a Yahoo Group known as the Private Wireless Forum (PWF). This group is made up of many LMR types, many public safety types, some commercial folks, and a number of vendors. Recently there was a thread about LMR operators not being able to find space on towers anymore. Space has either been priced out of their range or the sales staff does not want to bother with them. I contend that five or ten LMR users on a tower can provide a nice addition to the commercial income without much work on the tower owner's part.

If you own or lease space on a high level tower and it has room on it, you are leaving money on the table by not going after the LMR and public safety communities. The rents may sound trivial to those accustomed to the commercial networks with their millions of users, but it is money, and in most cases it is found money and it does not have any impact on your ability to continue to service your commercial customers.



So the benefits of leasing space to LMR single-stick customer are many. Not only in the incremental revenue but since these systems serve the local area, they are mostly owned and operated by local businesses. Add in an amateur radio system or two and you now have local tenants with ties to the community who are known and listened to by others, including city and county planners.

Andrew Seybold is the CEO and Principal Consultant of Andrew Seybold, Inc., a commercial and public safety consultancy that has served the wireless industry for more than thirty years. His website is www.Andewseybold.com.

(Ed: The opinions expressed above are those of author alone.)

By Andrew Seybold, CEO of [Andrew Seybold, Inc.](#)



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